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Community Comments...

A major thrust of the new federal administration in Washington—and one which seems to meet with the approval of more Americans than any other—is the pledge to get federal regulatory nit-picking off the back of the people.

Tired to death of being protected against themselves; sick of buying things they really don't want and won't use if they have them (seat belts, for example), Americans are looking forward to the federal establishment falling back into its historic role of doing for the people only those things they or their local governments can't do for themselves.

With this new breeze blowing from the East, it's a little discouraging now to see the same sort of bureaucratic overbearance becoming more of a threat from some of our State agencies than it ever was from the feds.

In the past year or so we have seen confrontations between our local Water Conservancy District and the State Land Board over plans and permits for the Mill Creek Water Project. The federal Bureau of Land Management, on the other hand, issued OK's and permits once their clearly-defined list of requirements was met. We have seen highway projects in San Juan County balloon in cost to satisfy the demands of personnel from the office of the Division of State History, and that same agency is causing additional expenses and delays in the huge Recapture Canyon Water Project, which is nearing construction phases just north of Blanding.

Now comes another agency from the State Capitol which may well threaten the existence of the extremely small-size mining industry in Utah.

The Chum Mine in San Juan County, a small 4-man operation, was closed by the Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining on Feb. 10 for discharge of water from the mine without a permit and failure to file a mine plan with the division. At a meeting in Salt Lake City on the following day, the water problem was determined to be under the authority of the Utah Department of Health, and a satisfactory resolution to the problem was agreed upon.

The threat to the small miners surfaced, according to one of the operators, when OGM staff members stated that they would never allow a small miner exemptions to the Utah Mined Land Reclamation Act, although counsel for the mine pointed out that the operation was disturbing less than two acres of land, which qualified it for exemption.

The whole matter will be brought before the full board of the Division at their regular meeting on Feb. 26 in Salt Lake City. If that board approves the recommendations which will obviously come from its staff, then closure of the operation will probably be the end result. The only other recourse, according to operators, would be litigation, and the size of the operation would make it almost too expensive to pursue that course, nor could it afford a full-fledged mining plan.

It is to be hoped that when the matter comes before the part-time, lay-citizen board of the Division, some common sense will prevail. Things are not always black and white, and exemptions would not be detailed in law unless there were reasons for granting them on certain occasions.

It's time Utah state agency people quit playing the game of "Monkey See, Monkey Do." Now when it finally appears that we may be moving from a period of personal oppression to cooperative partnership with our federal agencies, it would be a shame if we were to find that same familiar and oppressive hand slapping us on the back from a different direction.